

Plutonium Packaging On-line at Rocky Flats Site

The Rocky Flats Site achieved a crucial, and long-awaited, milestone in the cleanup and closure of the site when the first 3013 storage container rolled off the Plutonium Stabilization Packaging System (PuSPS) line on June 14, 2001. The Department of Energy (DOE) and Kaiser-Hill (K-H) workers, together, overcame design, installation, and operational obstacles to make Rocky Flats one of the first sites in the DOE complex to have a fully functional stabilization and packaging system for the 3013 storage can.

Both DOE Rocky Flats Field Office (RFFO) and K-H demonstrated that the PuSPS can be safely and compliantly operated in Building 371. Approval and start-up authorization came from the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (DNFSB) and DOE on June 7, 2001.

“The startup of the PuSPS operation is a credit to the hard work and dedication of all the employees from K-H and DOE,” said Hank Dalton, DOE-RFFO Assistant Manager for Facilities Disposition.

John Fulton, K-H Building 371/374 Project Manager, agreed. “This was one of the most challenging start-up projects ever attempted at Rocky Flats. There were literally hundreds of people involved in this project from the beginning, and they all deserve recognition and a lot more.”

The PuSPS was initiated in the summer of 1995 as a system to package radioactive material into a configuration for safe, long-term storage. It was then designed and fabricated by British Nuclear Fuels, Limited, with additional capability incorporated for stabilization of the material. The PuSPS team was able to overcome numerous hurdles in the development of this new technology in order to achieve hot start-up.

Over the next 18 months, the PuSPS will process and package the remaining plutonium metals and oxides into 50-year storage containers, known as 3013 cans. Between 1,500 and 2,000 cans packaged by the PuSPS will be shipped to the Savannah River Site for interim storage pending final disposition. In spite of the difficulties in achieving hot start-up, RFFO expects to be able to complete the packaging of the metals and oxides to Savannah River in time to meet the DNFSB recommendation of May 2002. ■

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